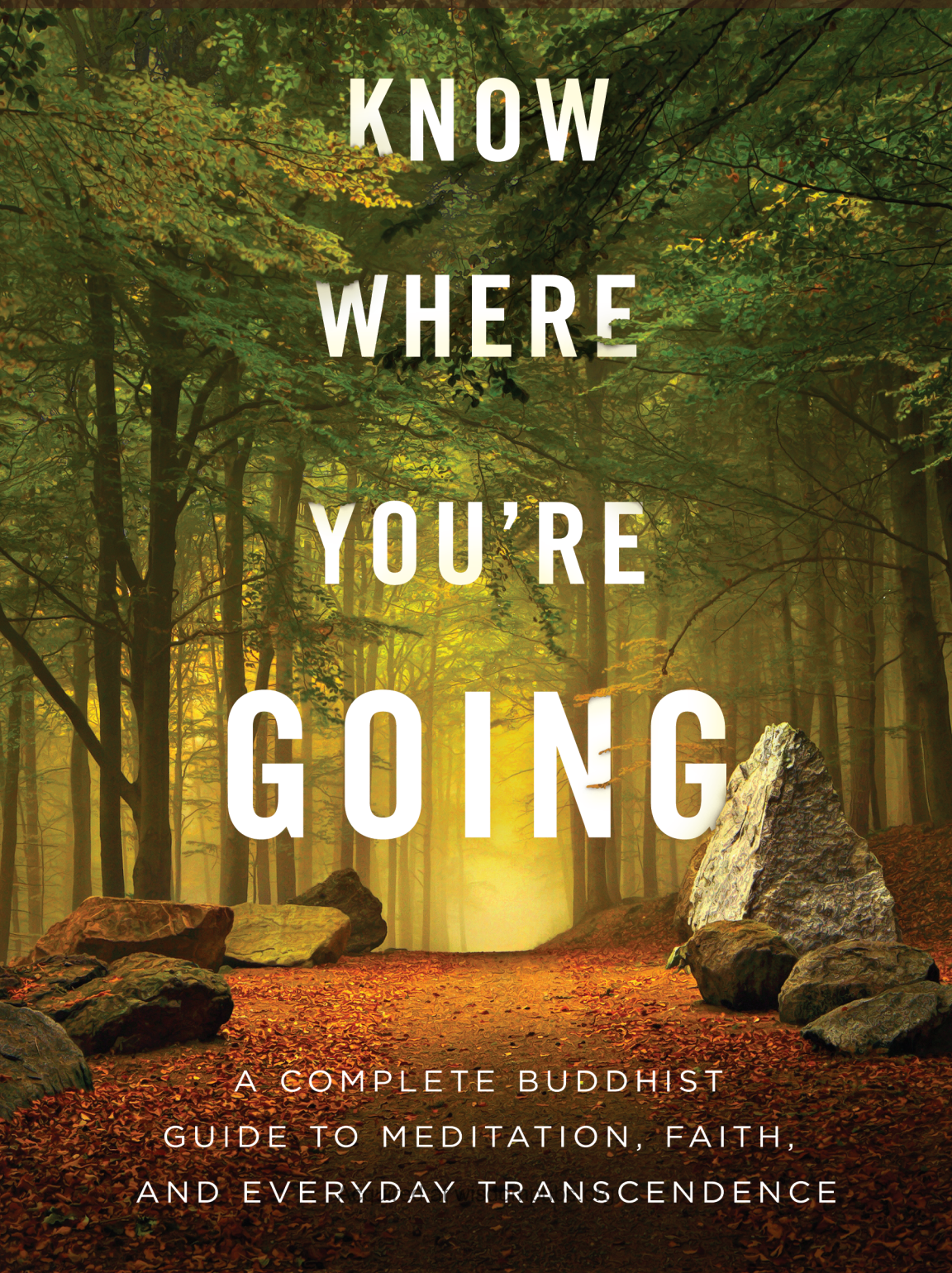
AYYA KHEMA



KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

A COMPLETE BUDDHIST GUIDE TO MEDITATION, FAITH, AND EVERYDAY TRANSCENDENCE

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WISDOM PUBLICATIONS • BOSTON

Acquired at wisdompubs.org

Wisdom Publications
199 Elm Street
Somerville, MA 02144 USA
www.wisdompubs.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Khema, Ayya, author.
[When the iron eagle flies]
Know where you're going : a complete Buddhist guide to meditation, faith and everyday transcendence / Ayya Khema.
pages cm
Originally published: When the iron eagle flies : Boston : Wisdom Publications, 2000.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-61429-193-0 — ISBN 1-61429-193-4 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-61429-210-4 (eBook)
1. Buddhism—Doctrines. 2. Meditation—Buddhism. I. Title.
BQ4165.K485 2014
294.3'444—dc23
2014015481

ISBN 978-1-61429-193-0 Ebook ISBN 978-1-61429-210-4

18 17 16 15 14
5 4 3 2 1

Cover photo "Way to Paradise" by Kilian Schönberger, www.kilianschoenberger.de.
Cover design by Philip Pascuzzo. Interior design by Gopa&Ted2, Inc.

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Foreword

After his attainment of enlightenment the Lord Buddha taught for many years in north India. He counseled his listeners not simply to accept his words out of faith but to think about them and then, if they found them convincing and appropriate, to put the advice into practice. Thus, his teachings spread because they impressed people, who found them useful in their own lives, and in turn passed them on to others. With time Buddhism spread throughout Asia.

However, the relevance of the Buddha's message is not confined to one geographical area, for all human beings can apply what he taught. In recent years people from Western lands have had greater access to living Buddhist tradition and have taken increasing interest in it; some have even become Buddhists themselves. One such is Ayya Khema, who presents here the advice she has given while leading a meditation course in Canada based on her own experience. Such efforts are indeed heartening, and I hope that through them all beings may find peace.

Tenzin Gyatso
H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

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Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to my parents, all my teachers, all my students, all my friends, and all those who have supported the Buddha's teachings in the past and who support them now.

Special thanks come from my heart to the Venerable Pema Chödrön, who invited me to give these teachings, to Ani Trime Lhamo, who transcribed the cassettes on which this book is based, and to Claudia Klump, who diligently helped with the typing.

May beings everywhere rejoice and benefit from these words.

Ayya Khema
Buddha-Haus,
Germany, September 1989

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Introduction

Before I begin my teaching I would like to explain the origin of the Buddha's discourses. Three months after the Buddha's death (*parinibbāna*) the first great council of enlightened ones (*arahant*s) took place. At that time the Buddha's teaching was systematized and put into orderly categories. When he was alive, he taught as befitted the occasion, often in answer to questions. In those days religious teaching was always transmitted orally.

At the first great council of enlightened ones, the Venerable Ananda, who had been the Buddha's attendant for twenty-five years, recited the discourses (*sutta*s), and the Venerable Upāli recited the Vinaya (the rules of the order of monks and nuns). Approximately 17,500 discourses of the Buddha were thus transmitted. About a hundred years later the second council of enlightened ones was convened. The enlightened ones were called together because there were significant differences of opinion, particularly concerning the Vinaya, and in holding these different viewpoints the Sangha (community of monks and nuns) had split into various factions. It had become imperative to finalize the whole of the Buddha's transmission so that a definitive body of teaching would be safeguarded.

Two hundred and fifty years after the Buddha's *parinibbāna* the third great council of enlightened ones took place. At that time the Venerable Ananda, the Venerable Moggallāna, and the Venerable Sariputta, who had been the great disciples of the Buddha, each had one disciple still living. Their pupils were each over one hundred years old, of course, but their presence helped to authenticate the teaching as it was transmitted. At this stage the *sutta*s and the Vinaya were written down in Sinhalese script using the Pali language. Today we can read Pali using the Roman alphabet.

At that time King Asoka, the great Buddhist king of India, had sent his son, the Venerable Mahindra, to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism. The king of Sri Lanka readily adopted this new teaching, and many noblemen

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became monks (*bhikkhu*s). The monks undertook to put what we call the Pali canon into written form. In Pali this is called the *Tipiṭaka* (*ti* means three and *pitaka* means basket). There is a reason for this name. The original manuscript was written down on palm (*ola*) leaves with a *stilo*, a pointed steel dagger-like instrument, which scratched the letters into the soft leaves. An ink made from berries was rubbed over the whole page and then gently removed, so that only the indentations retained the color. Palm leaves were not bound like books but had to be carried around in baskets. Three separate ones were used: one for *sutta*s, one for Vinaya, and one for Abhidhamma, to keep them apart. Since that time, monks of Sri Lanka have copied the original palm leaves onto new ones in the same manner, because the leaves eventually crumble and fall apart. It is a matter of pride and tradition for the monks of the monastery built around the rock where Mahindra first preached the Dhamma to copy the original leaves year after year.

The written transmission has always been supported by oral transmission; reading a book can never be the same as hearing the Dhamma from a teacher. The oral transmission from the Buddha's time was passed from teacher to disciple in spite of political upheavals and natural disasters, and it continues to be so today.

In order to benefit from an oral transmission, one must listen with heart and mind. The mind conceptualizes; the heart believes without clearly understanding. Together they can grasp the meaning behind the words. Words are concepts, which can be twisted out of shape. Our minds are magicians and are capable of transforming one thing into another.

The teaching of the Buddha is like an enormous map showing a vast landscape with a roadway leading from here to there. It is his unique gift that this map is offered and made available to anyone who wants it. Naturally, not having traversed the whole length of the road, one cannot possibly know whether what lies ahead is correctly delineated. There is only one way of approaching that which one has not yet experienced, namely by opening heart and mind to hear whether truth is being expounded. The heart must summon up enough confidence to try the next step, otherwise conceptual thinking and logical conclusions will stand in the way.

This teaching, tried and true over the centuries, is one of the greatest jewels humanity possesses. The original words of the master are overpow-

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eringly effective in changing pain and grief (*dukkha*) to happiness (*sukkha*). Access to it is through the heart and the mind. The Buddha recommended study and practice, so that knowledge can point the way and practice can do the work.

The discourse you will hear, called the *Upanisa Sutta* from the Connected Discourses (Saṃyutta Nikāya), teaches us the path from our present pain and grief to liberation. Can we do it in the scope of a seven-day meditation course? The Buddha says we can. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the discourse on the foundations of mindfulness, the Buddha said that if one practices mindfulness for seven years one will definitely have the result either of becoming enlightened or not returning to the wheel of birth and death. Then he said, "Nay, not for seven years, even six years, five, four, three, two, or even one year. Even for eleven months, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, or even one month. Nay, even for seven days." That, of course, means mindfulness in its perfection. It is unusual, to say the least, to reach complete freedom in seven days, but it is certainly possible to explain the path of practice within that time.

There is a story about the Buddha taking a walk with his monks in the forest. Picking up a handful of leaves, he said to the monks, "Which are greater in number, the leaves on the trees or the leaves in my hand?" The monks said, "Sir, the leaves on the trees, of course, are far greater in number than those you have in your hand." The Buddha replied, "That's right. What I have taught you, compared with what I know, is like the leaves in my hand, but it is perfectly sufficient to attain liberation."

The authenticity of the *Tipiṭaka* can be felt when people who were present when the Buddha spoke are mentioned by name and profession. The place where the *sutta* was being taught is often described, and the same people occur so many times that one feels one actually knows them. Many of the *sutta*s start with the words "*Evam me suttam*," meaning "Thus have I heard," an opening used by the Venerable Ananda speaking at the first great council of enlightened ones. He went on to say where he heard the teaching and who else was present. This was to ensure that he was repeating the discourse correctly; in the case of discrepancies, those who had also been present could be asked to confirm his account.

We can feel enormous gratitude and joy to be among those people on earth who are able to hear the oral transmission of the Buddha's teaching.

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Considering that there are more than five billion people on this planet, this is a most fortunate karma resultant. Joy and gratitude should be the two factors that open our hearts to the teaching. The mind alone does not suffice. Meditation generates certain experiences, always connected with feeling, which is our "heart quality."

The Buddha himself was a prince and lived in great luxury. He found that all the indulgences open to him and the luxury in which he lived did not bring him happiness. This certainly applies to today's society. We can have all the luxury and indulgences possible, and yet happiness escapes us. The Buddha felt that his luxurious life prevented his true understanding of reality. He left the palace and became an ascetic, mortifying his body for six years, but that too failed to bring the desired results. After having found his own way to enlightenment, he said that neither indulgence nor asceticism was right, but rather a middle path that avoided both extremes.

The middle path is always one of simplicity—of providing necessities, but nothing more. This simplicity can also be noticed in the teaching. There are few rituals, no initiations, and no secrets. The *sutta* that I have chosen for this meditation course contains all the elements needed for a complete spiritual path. As is common in the Buddha's expositions, it is a graduated path, which starts with our ordinary, everyday experience and gradually shows us how to gain access to liberation, to final freedom.

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1 The "Why" and "How" of Meditation

There is very little doubt that those of us who want to meditate are looking for something other than what we are used to in the world. We are already wise enough to know that the world hasn't fulfilled our expectations, and maybe we already know that it may never do so. That is a big step in itself.

When we sit down to meditate, we are trying to transcend our everyday consciousness, the consciousness used to transact ordinary business, the one used in the world's marketplace as we go shopping, bring up our children, work in an office or in our business, clean the house, check our bank statements, and all the rest of daily living. Everyone knows that kind of consciousness, and without it we can't function. It is our survival consciousness, and we need it for that. It cannot reach far enough or deep enough into the Buddha's teachings, because these are unique and profound; our everyday consciousness is neither unique nor profound, just utilitarian.

In order to attain the kind of consciousness that is capable of going deeply enough into the teachings to make them our own and thereby change our whole inner view, we need a mind with the ability to remove itself from the ordinary thinking process. Attaining this sort of mind is only possible through meditation. There is no other way. Meditation is therefore a means, and not an end in itself. It is a means to change the mind's capacity in such a way that it can perceive entirely different realities from the ones we are used to. The recognition that meditation is a tool is important, because it is often wrongly considered to be an end in itself. In Pali, meditation is called *bhāvanā*, "mind training," to be used for honing the mind until it becomes such a sharp tool that it cuts through everyday realities.

Most people sit down to meditate in order to make their minds

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peaceful. But a calm mind is only one of the two essential aspects of meditation. Insight (*vipassanā*) is the other. The goal of meditation is insight, and tranquility (*samatha*) is the means to that end. According to the Pali canon, the Buddha taught forty different methods of meditation, some used strictly for achieving calm and others for attaining insight. We do not need to practice that many.

Everybody is looking for some calm, some peace, and the ability to stop the mind from continuing its usual chatter. While it is necessary to cultivate the calm aspect of meditation, most people find it impossible to sit down and immediately become tranquil. Unfortunately, our minds are used to being exactly the opposite. They are thinking, evaluating, and judging from morning to night, and then dreaming from night to morning, so that they don't get a moment's rest. If we were to treat our bodies in that way we would soon be out of commission. The body can't handle that for more than a few days, never having a moment's rest, working all the time. When we ask this of our mind we are surprised that things don't turn out the way we hoped, and that the world doesn't work the way we thought it would. It would be even more surprising if it were otherwise, because what we see in our own mind is exactly what is going on in everybody else's. That, too, is an important aspect of the meditative mind—to realize that we are not individually burdened with all this unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*). It is a universal aspect of existence, comprising the first noble truth of the Buddha's teaching.[1]

Unsatisfactoriness is universal. It doesn't belong to any one of us but to all of us. Because our minds are not yet trained, the world is the way it is, and meditation is a struggle. We need to learn to halt the habit patterns of the mind. Our minds are used to thinking, but when we want to become calm and peaceful, that is exactly what we have to stop doing. It is easier said than done, because the mind will continue to do what it is used to doing. There is another reason why the mind finds it difficult to refrain from its habits: thinking is the only ego support we have while we are meditating, and particularly when we keep noble silence. "I think, therefore I am"—some Western philosophy accepts that as an absolute. Actually, it is a relative truth that all of us experience.

When we are thinking, we know that we are here; when there is no chattering in the mind, we believe we have lost control. But actually, it's

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exactly the other way around. As long as we can't stop thinking, we have no control. We are in control of our mind only when we are able to stop thinking when we want to. The difficulty arising for most, if not all, meditators is this aspect of letting go. To let go of the only ego support we have while we are meditating, namely our thinking, has to be a deliberate act. When we go about our daily business we deliberately direct our mind toward what we want to do. If we want to work in the kitchen we deliberately go there and turn our attention to what needs to be done. If we have work to do in an office we deliberately turn our mind to letters, files, and other office business. It's the same in meditation.

Our first difficulty is that although we would like to become peaceful and calm and have no thoughts, our mind does not want to obey. It refuses to do so because then we would appear to have no support for our existence, and because our habits are against it. So instead of trying over and over again to become calm, we can use whatever arises to gain some insight. A little bit of insight brings a little bit of calm, and a little bit of calm brings a little bit of insight. Calm has no purpose other than to change our ordinary, everyday consciousness into a transcendental consciousness that is able to understand and use the teachings of the Buddha to change from an ordinary being into a transcendental being. If calm doesn't arise it is not a great problem, because whatever else does arise helps us to gain some insight into who we really are. This is the main reason for a meditation retreat. It is an inward journey to give us a little more understanding of who we are. Nothing could be more interesting, but there are some aspects from which we would like to run at times. We can't run away, while we are meditating, unless we start fantasizing and making up stories. Everybody is liable to do that, but when it does happen, let us realize that it is simply an escape.

To really further our inner journey, we are going to observe noble silence. Noble silence means not to talk to one another, which may be difficult when we are among friends. Take the difficulty as a challenge, and remember that challenges are steppingstones. Noble silence is one of the most effective tools for an inner journey. Usually we only have the opportunity for noble silence when we go on a retreat. Normally there are people around us with whom we communicate, which is one means of escape from our own suffering. Pain and grief is familiar to everyone even

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if we use different words for it, such as anger, fear, worry, upset, restlessness, and many others.

It is important to keep in mind that the very first noble truth the Buddha expounded upon enlightenment was that "unsatisfactoriness is." Unsatisfactoriness is a feature of existence. If we experience it in ourselves, we prove that the Buddha's teaching is correct. That's all. We don't need to start suffering over it, we can just observe it and say, "Evidence." There are innumerable things that expose us to unsatisfactoriness, but we can remember the first noble truth that "unsatisfactoriness is" and say, "That's right, that's what the Buddha taught."

The Buddha also propounded the second noble truth, namely that the reason for unsatisfactoriness is craving. We may look into ourselves and inquire, "What do I want that I am not getting? What am I getting that I don't want?" These are the two reasons, which are actually one and the same, for having unsatisfactoriness. There's only one way of dealing with suffering when it arises, and that's to drop the wanting; suffering will then disappear. Such insight is only possible when we stop going outward, through communication and through our many activities. We must have quiet times when we can really look inside ourselves.

Perhaps you have meditated before. Nevertheless, I will explain to you various meditation methods and their possible results. Whatever method we use is only valid if it brings results. If a certain method doesn't work, it's best to change it. There is nothing to hang on to where a meditation method is concerned. People have different tendencies and different characters, and although our minds may have the same potential and capacities, we do need different approaches. Some minds are visual and like pictures; some like words, telling stories; and some prefer numbers, putting everything in neat little boxes. There are minds that delight in attention to detail. We may already know what kind of mind we have, or we can experiment in meditation and see which one of the different methods is most conducive to our becoming calm.

Meditating on the breath is how one practices the first foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of the body (*kāyânupassanā*). Such mindfulness should also extend to everything we do outside the meditation room, which is something we will often forget, but at least we should direct our attention toward that goal. It is pleasant to sit and try to become calm by

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watching the breath, but if we do not reinforce our practice with mindfulness outside the meditation sessions, it will not have the desired results. We cannot split our mind in two, one part for meditation and one for other activities. We have one mind and we have to train it as a whole, which extends to whatever we do: getting up, walking, opening or closing the door, any kind of work, always being fully attentive to the bodily action. Mindfulness of the body extends to having a shower, going to the toilet, getting up in the morning, taking off and putting on clothes. One of the bodily actions most conducive to mindfulness of the body is eating, because the eating process involves many physical actions.

No one can really teach us to be mindful. We teach ourselves, using landmarks and signposts. In our tradition we don't have gurus. We have people who reiterate the Buddha's words from the Pali canon and who may be able to give us some advice. Mindfulness can only be practiced and taught to oneself by oneself. Nobody can help us to be mindful; only we know when we are.

Being mindful means that mind and body are in the same place. "Washing dishes while washing dishes" is a famous phrase of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese meditation teacher. Not thinking "I wish I had finished," or "Why are they using so many dishes?" or "I'm glad I don't have to do this tomorrow," or "Why do I always end up washing dishes?"—nothing like that. Just washing dishes, that's all. The same applies to eating: not "I like this. I wonder how they made it?" Just eating. This applies to all other physical actions. The Buddha said, "The one way for the purification of beings, for the elimination of pain, grief, and lamentation, for the final ending of all pain and grief, for entering the noble path, for attaining liberation, is mindfulness." What more do we want? We all have some mindfulness; we just have to cultivate it.

Meditation is the means by which we can practice mindfulness to the point where insight becomes so strong that we can see absolute reality behind the relative. Mindfulness trained in meditation can then continue in every activity. Here we are only considering mindfulness of body action, because we make use of the body constantly. As the body can be touched and seen, we have a chance of really having mind and body in the same place, instead of letting the mind run off into its usual ramifications while the body does something else. If we were to keep mind and body in one

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place we would have no problem watching the breath, because that is all that is really happening—we are breathing. Nothing else. Everything else is conjecture.

When we keep our attention on the breath, the mind, being with the breath, is actually mindful. This is called "mindfulness of in-breath/out-breath" or *ānâpanāsati* in Pali. We will notice again and again that the mind just does not wish to stay attentive but wants to stray to something else. We will use this straying to gain insight into ourselves. We won't just say, "Thinking, thinking," because that doesn't tell us anything new; rather, we shall learn to label. We are going to say "past," "future," or "nonsense" (the last nearly always fits). We can say "wanting," "hoping," or "planning." The last one is very popular. We think we can't get anything done while we are sitting, so at least we can plan what to do next week. The first label that comes to mind should be used; we need not try to find exactly the right label, because that induces new thinking.

If thoughts are like clouds in the background, not solid but quick to disappear, it is unnecessary to run after them with a label. But if thoughts are solid, it is helpful to label them. Labeling then has two results. First of all, it dissolves the thought, because the mind can't do two things simultaneously. Giving a label means watching the thought objectively and not becoming involved in it. Therefore, it dissolves like a water bubble. The second very useful result of labeling is some insight into our own thinking process and patterns. This insight is extremely important, because it helps the meditator not to fall into the error of always believing his or her own thinking. Only people who never meditate believe what they are thinking. When one has labeled one's thoughts in meditation, one realizes that the thinking process is quite arbitrary and often has no real meaning—it is nonsense, there is no sense in it, and it is not even wanted.

Gaining such an insight into our thinking during meditation helps us in everyday life to drop thoughts that are not useful, and this makes our life less stressful. If we can drop a thought by labeling it during meditation we can do the same in daily life. Otherwise we have meditated in vain—we have been sitting and getting sore knees without any result. We must be able to transfer our meditation practice into everyday life.

In meditation we drop all thoughts. When they recur, we drop them again. Instead of thinking, we put our attention on the breath. In daily

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life we drop unwholesome thoughts and substitute wholesome ones. It's exactly the same substitution process, and when we have learned it in meditation it can become a good habit in daily life. Not that it will always work (there's no such thing as always), but we understand the possibilities.

When we listen to the words of the Buddha, we know that he is showing us an ideal to work for, and that if we have not yet reached that ideal, we need not blame ourselves. "Awareness, no blame, change" is an important formula to remember: become aware of what is going on within, but do not attach any blame to it. Things are the way they are, but we, as thinking human beings, have the ability to change, and that is what we are doing in meditation. We can drop the thought and go back to noticing our breath, and the more often we do this, the easier and more natural it becomes. Eventually the mind gives in and says, "All right then, I'll stop all this thinking for a while." Not only does this become easier because it has become a habit, but we shall be more and more determined to abandon discursive, nondirectional thinking, because it will have become apparent how unnecessary it really is. It brings no results, it goes around in circles, and it is disturbing. Thus, the mind recognizes the value of staying with the subject of meditation.

If we can learn to use mindfulness of the breath in meditation, then we have a very good grip on mindfulness in everyday life. One supports the other. It is impossible to make two people out of each one of us; we are training only one mind. Obviously, the time spent on our daily activities far exceeds the time we spend in meditation. Therefore, we cannot just drop all training when we step out of the meditation room.

There are five ways of using the breath. The most traditional is also the most difficult, but it is the most productive of calm. We simply notice the breath at the nostrils as it moves in and out. In our tradition we watch both in- and out-breaths; we do not wish to give the mind a chance to wander off into its usual discursiveness, but want it to stay with the breath at all times. The wind of the breath creates a sensation when it touches the nostrils, which helps one to focus at that point. This is the most "one-pointed" way of concentrating on the breath and is particularly useful for experienced meditators. "One-pointed" means being in one spot only, which is a very important aspect of meditation. Because the attention is focused on one point only, it helps the mind to become sharp and unwavering.

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We can use various support systems to help us remain mindful of the breath. One of these is counting the breaths. We count "one" on the in-breath, "one" on the out-breath, "two" on the in-breath, "two" on the out-breath, all the way up to ten. Every time the mind wanders off we return to "one," no matter whether we were at four, five, or eight. This is a good method for people who like numbers and who have orderly, organized minds.

Some people are not very fond of numbers but prefer words. Try using the word "peace" on the in-breath, "peace" on the out-breath. Actually, any word will do. We could use "peace" on the in-breath and "love" on the out-breath, filling ourselves with peace and extending love outward. However, it is preferable to use just one word, because the more input there is into the mind, the less calm it becomes. It is sufficient to keep the attention focused on "peace" on the in-breath, filling ourselves with it, and "peace" on the out-breath, letting it flow outward. This is very useful to those to whom words are important.

If we don't like either numbers or words, then we can use a picture—for example, we can experience the breath as if it were a cloud that fills us when we breathe in. The out-breath can be visualized as a cloud coming out to envelop us. Some people see the cloud as taking on different shapes: larger on the out-breath and smaller when it is taken in through the nostrils. Any support for concentration is better than discursive thinking; using visualization is not as one-pointed as just watching the breath, but it's much better than thinking about what happened last week, or what might happen next week.

There is another method that is helpful to those who are still new to meditation. We follow the in-breath into the body and notice it wherever it becomes apparent. It goes in through the nostrils and up the nose; we can feel it in the throat and in the lungs, as far down as the stomach; then we can follow it leaving the body again. We do not search for the sensations created by the breath, but we put our attention on all the spots, where they become apparent to us, both when breathing in and when breathing out. This is a particularly useful method for meditators who are primarily concerned with feelings. The inner feelings connected with the inhaling and exhaling of the breath become apparent and can keep the mind attentive and centered on one's inner being. This greatly helps to reduce the mind's tendency to connect to outer happenings through thinking and reacting.

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The last method of attending to sensations connected with the breath is to be aware of filling oneself with breath and emptying oneself out again. That, too, is useful as a means for concentration.

We have considered five different methods of using in-breaths and out-breaths. Use only one method at a time. Pick the one that feels comfortable and use it during one meditation session. If it seems impossible to concentrate even slightly, try another method at the next meditation session. Do not change methods during one sitting.

If the mind wants to run off, it is useful to direct the attention toward the impermanence of the breath. The untrained mind always wants to think, but at least we can give it something useful to think about. It doesn't have to be allowed to think about whatever it pleases, but rather it can think about how each in-breath finishes, then each out-breath likewise—constant change, on which our life depends. We could not stay alive without our breath coming and going all the time. If we were to keep the in-breath, we would be dead within a few minutes; the same would occur if we were to hang on to the out-breath. This is an important insight that can link the mind to the impermanent aspect of each person, particularly ourselves.

If the mind already has a certain ability to stay with the breath, let it remain there, but if there is a constant thought process, one thought after another, direct the mind toward impermanence. Attention to that aspect of the breath gives rise to a question: if life depends on such an in- and outflow, what can we find within us that doesn't come and go? Then the mind may turn within and may be able to stay on the breath a little more easily.

Everybody likes to have some calm and peace, and should have them, too, otherwise meditation becomes a chore and never a pleasant abiding. But we do need directives for insight, especially as Westerners. We have been trained from kindergarten on to investigate, to find out, and to ponder. Naturally, we are still doing that, and it is difficult for our minds to stop on demand. So we have to allow for all possible approaches in our meditation.

Experiencing the impermanence of the breath brings useful insight and is immensely preferable to thoughts about the past or the future. Being able to stay with the breath means that we are mindfully "in the moment." Absurd as it may seem, without training we hardly ever manage to do this. We can only live life each moment, and yet we are concerned with the past,

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which has gone irrevocably, and with the future, which is nothing but a hope and a prayer. When the future really comes, it is always called the present. We can never experience the future; it is nothing but a concept. If we want to gain wisdom, we have to experience life, and the only way we will ever do so is to be in each moment. The more we train the mind to be in each moment, the more we will actually know what human life means. Otherwise we will be either remembering or planning. This is where labeling helps us. To be present now means to be with each breath. We cannot watch a breath that is past, nor one that is still in the future. We can only watch the one that is happening. This is a very useful way of understanding how our minds work. The Buddha didn't want us to believe his statements without question but to have enough confidence to investigate them. They are in fact nothing but directions, guidelines, and signposts, to try out for ourselves.

What we consider a good posture for meditation is a straight but relaxed back, which means relaxing the shoulders by lifting them and letting them fall, relaxing the stomach, which is also a point of tension, and relaxing the neck. Keep the legs in a position where they will feel comfortable for some time. Hands can be on the knees, palms up or palms down, or together in the lap. We meditate with our eyes closed. If we feel drowsy, we open them immediately, look at any light, move the body to increase blood circulation, and then close them again.

Any painful feelings that arise can be used as a means to gain insight. Painful feelings are useful to teach us two important lessons. When we get a painful feeling, in this case physical, our immediate reaction is "I want to get rid of it." This is how we live our lives and this is how we remain in the round of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). We want to eliminate pain and yet keep the pleasant feelings, but that can't be done. Nobody can win that battle, so the sooner we find out that this is not a skillful way of dealing with pain, the easier it becomes for us to deal with unpleasant feelings in daily living.

The pain that arises during meditation does so in a certain way, which is important to recognize. There is touch contact of the knee on the pillow, or there may be the contact of the left foot on the thigh—wherever the pain is, there is touch contact. All our sense contacts generate feelings. The enlightened one also has feelings, of which there are only three kinds: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. We usually consider the neutral ones as

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quite pleasant because at least they are not unpleasant, so we actually only deal with pleasant and unpleasant feelings. We are concerned with them during most of our waking hours. From touch contact arises feeling, and from that comes perception, the realization that "this is painful" or "this is not nice." Let's say that we call it "pain." Then comes the immediate, impulsive reaction in the mind (which is also karma-making): "I don't like it," "I want to get rid of it," "I've got to move," "This could be dangerous, my blood circulation is stopping," and other thoughts like that.

The mental formations (*sankhāra*) are also our karma formations. We make karma first by thought, then by speech, and lastly by action. At the moment of thought we have already made slightly negative karma through negativity in the mind. This is not a great problem because it arises out of an impulsive, instinctive human tendency, but if we want to transcend our human problems and our marketplace consciousness, we also have to transcend our instinctive reactions. We could think, "This is an unpleasant feeling called pain, but I didn't ask for it, so why am I calling it mine? Isn't it just something that happened?"

Here we learn detachment, to let go of the unpleasantness and get back to the subject of meditation. Everybody can do that for a limited time. How limited that time is, is an individual matter. When the unpleasant feeling calls us again, we can repeat the same thought process. We may also recognize that the body always has some pain, and that we only suffer because we are not accepting that fact. Without the resistance to pain and the craving to change it, there would be no stress. There may come a moment when the mind says, "This is all very well, but I can't handle any more of this pain." Then we change our position gently, slowly, so as not to disturb our neighbor, or our own mind, or admit to ourselves that we have been conquered by our own unpleasant feelings.

That's perfectly all right. We are often conquered by our feelings, but here we have a chance to realize it. We are conquered because we suffer, owing to our unpleasant feelings. If we could allow an unpleasant feeling simply to be an unpleasant feeling, which it really is, and not react to it, we would have conquered ourselves. This is therefore a very important inner journey. It is useless to sit there with teeth clenched and say, "I'm going to sit through this if it's the last thing I do," or "I am going to show them that I can do it." This attitude is connected with hate and not with insight. We

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have all experienced pain in our lives; now we can gain insight by noticing our reactions to it. This is a very helpful way of using unpleasantness in the body.

Another way to use unpleasantness is to keep the mind focused on the painful feeling, making it one's subject of meditation. This is only possible if one does not dislike the feeling; otherwise there is only rejection in the mind. Unwavering attention on the unpleasant feeling provides an opportunity to recognize its changeable nature. The feeling may then actually dissolve completely.

To sum up, we can either get back to mindfulness of breathing by detaching ourselves from the feeling, or by using it for our subject of meditation. We may also be conquered by it at times.

If the weather permits, we can walk outside. Walking meditation has several advantages. First of all, it gives the body a chance to move after sitting still for some time. It also leads us into mindfulness in an activity that we use in daily living. We do a lot of walking in our lives, so if we learn to be attentive and mindful in walking meditation, it is quite easy to transfer that to our daily life.

The essential aspect of walking meditation is exactly the same as the attention on the in-breath and out-breath. It is designed to keep the mind focused on a physical movement. Whereas in the first case we were watching the movement of the breath, in walking meditation we are watching the movement of the feet. The same opportunities for calm and insight exist in both methods.

Choose your own walking path, approximately twenty-five paces long. Mark the beginning and the end of the path by selecting a rock or a bush or whatever may be there. Do not intersect with another person, because that is disturbing to both. Either walk parallel or find a space that isn't being used by someone else. We should look down, because if we look around we can be distracted by the scenery and pay attention to the trees, flowers, and birds rather than to walking. We keep our eyes open, and they automatically look down in front of our feet. Hands can be held together either in front of us or behind us, so that they don't move and distract us. The attention can be on a threefold or a sixfold movement of the feet. Threefold means raising the foot, carrying it, and putting it down. The second foot is raised only when the first is completely down, which slows

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walking automatically and also prevents us from having two simultaneous movements. Usually we just touch the ground and immediately raise the other foot. The pace at which we walk is up to each individual—whatever is suitable. In the threefold movement we can just watch the action, or we can count "one, two, three" in the mind while watching the movement. We can say, "Raising, carrying, putting down," in order to help us pay attention.

It is very helpful to stand still for a moment if the mind goes off into discursive thinking. Again, labeling will help. If it is massive thinking, standing still already helps to let go of that. It doesn't matter how often we stand still; there are no value judgments. There's nothing but awareness, no judging of oneself or others. It is simply knowing what is going on within. Mindfulness is knowing only, so if we know what's going on, we can label the thought, as we did when we were sitting, or stand still to encourage bare attention once more.

We can also use the sixfold movement. We take the foot off the ground, lifting first the heel, then the rest of the foot, followed by raising, carrying, putting down the heel, then the rest of the foot. Being more complicated, this requires more mindfulness, and those who like numbers can count from one to six as an aid. When there is greater concentration, we can dispense with counting. Those who like words could say, "Heel, sole, raising, carrying, heel, sole," as an aid to concentration. Those who tend to visualization can imagine that when raising the foot there is a flower embedded in the ground underneath which now has a chance to grow. As the foot is carried forward the flower opens up, and as the foot is put down the flower closes again.

We can also realize that the earth does not object when we stamp on it, walk on it, or spit on it and will always patiently endure, which is a quality we can develop within ourselves. Whatever we do—putting the foot down hard or gently—the earth will not object. When we walk on grass, we could notice that the grass bends under our foot, but as we raise our foot again the grass stands up straight. This is a quality that the Buddha compared to being like bamboo—bending in the storm of pain and grief, but never breaking. The grass also exemplifies this ability of acceptance.

All these are "mind crutches" to help us stay with the subject rather than thinking of extraneous matters. Sensations are another aid to staying

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focused on the movement. When the foot is down on the ground, there is a solid feeling, a touch sensation. As we raise it, the sensation becomes an airy feeling. As we push forward, there's a feeling of movement breaking through the resistance of inertia, and as we put the foot down again, we have a solid touch once more. These feelings are very helpful in keeping our attention on the action, as otherwise it can become quite automatic, with only half-focused attention. This is not mindfulness. For the three-fold movement, we can use the same "mind crutches."

Just as we can realize and observe that the breath is in constant flux and only keeps us alive when it is so, in the same way the movement of the feet is an ever-recurring, changing flow. We can use our body only when that quality of infinite change is present, graphically illustrating one of the three characteristics of all existence: impermanence. This observation leads to insight, while uninterrupted attention on the subject of meditation leads to calm. Both have to be practiced in conjunction with each other.

Questions

STUDENT: *As part of noble silence, should one avoid eye contact, since that is communication also?*

AYYA KHEMA: It is very useful to avoid eye contact. Nobody should think that the other person is unfriendly or doesn't like one, but should realize that he or she is protecting his or her inner journey.

S: *Are the five methods of using the breath practiced in addition to the basic method of following the breath, or do we substitute them for that?*

AK: The first method is the traditional way of watching, or following, the breath. The next four are support systems to give the mind a little more to do besides watching the breath. We can choose one of the five methods depending upon our own inclinations.

S: *Are you still watching the breath when you use the other four support systems?*

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AK: Yes. You watch the breath and count it, or watch the breath and name it, or watch the breath and picture it, or watch the breath and notice feel-ings. The breath is always the main subject; the others are supports.

S: *In all five methods, with the exception of counting, isn't the process of label-ing whatever arises a form of discursiveness?*

AK: No. Labeling helps us to gain insight into our habitual thought pro-cess, no matter which of the methods of watching the breath we employ, including counting.

S: *I recall in your instructions you said to go back to "one" if you lose track while counting the breath.*

AK: If the thought that arises is to be clearly known, it is a good practice to label it and then to go back to "one," if the method of counting the breath is being used.

S: *And you use the first label that comes to your mind?*

AK: The first label that comes to mind is usually correct anyway. If we don't use the first thought, we may have discursive thoughts about the label.

S: *So if one just says, "Oh, that's—"?*

AK: No, that's not a label, that's an exclamation. A label is something that identifies, like food packages in a supermarket, for example. If we go through a supermarket and take many tins and cartons without looking at the labels, we might end up with a lot of cat food, and may not even have a cat at home. The label on the tin tells us what is inside. If the tins were just labeled "oh," we might collect a lot of cat food without knowing what we were doing. The identification labels can be "future," "past," "nonsense," "hoping," "planning," "remembering," "wanting," "identifying," or any oth-ers that may come to mind.

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